



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to PA President Alcee Hastings

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 11, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to again welcome President Hastings, Congressman Hastings here for his first appearance as President of the Parliamentary Assembly. I would also like to note that today is a very special day for America: it is Veteran's Day, a day where we commemorate those who fought and gave their lives for the very same principles that we engage in here everyday, which is to keep the flame of liberty, the flame of freedom burning forever. I so very much agree with many of the comments that President Hastings made. I am sorry to say that there is one where I do take exception: and that is, I am, sorry to say Congressman, overjoyed at the results of the election – but I can well understand why you feel the way you do.

The United States believes that the Parliamentary Assembly is making a significant contribution to the overall work of the OSCE. As I mentioned, we very much note also, in particular, the cooperative involvement of the Parliamentary Assembly in the OSCE/ODIHR election observations, including in the United States last week – but also in so many other countries in the world where what the OSCE is doing in that area is making such a huge difference.

We very much welcome the appointments that President Hastings has made of several Special Representatives. We would note here that many of these correspond to issues that are priorities for the United States in the work of the OSCE. Equality of opportunity for women and men, combating trafficking in human beings, and working with our Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation are all areas where we welcome a parliamentary perspective and believe that such a focus can greatly contribute to our growing OSCE efforts.

I would also like to note here that we value the Parliamentary Assembly Liaison Office here in Vienna, and that we have a fine working relationship with Ambassador Nothelle.

I'd like to point out that OSCE is following up on several recommendations made by the Parliamentary Assembly in its Edinburgh Declaration, and in previous declarations.

The focus this year and last on anti-Semitism was the result of a Parliamentary Assembly initiative. The Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism and the Brussels Conference on Racism – which you so kindly commented on, Mr. President - were a product of this cooperation between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Permanent Council. We hope that CiO Personal Representatives will soon be appointed to follow-up on the two decisions coming out of those

Conferences and that the appointed people will be able to get on with their jobs soon. We have talked long enough about this issue – it's time to put people in place and let them begin doing their job.

We are continuing the focus on combating trafficking in human beings. It is recommended in the Edinburgh Declaration that participating States address their responsibility in ensuring that military service members, and civilians accompanying them, do not contribute to trafficking. The United States has thus proposed that, in this regard, the Sofia Ministerial endorse the NATO Anti-Trafficking Policy and commit participating States to address the role of international peacekeepers in contributing to a demand for trafficking.

We also are increasing our work to ensure equality of opportunity within the OSCE and participating States for women and men, and hope to adopt soon a new Action Plan to Promote Gender Equality.

At the invitation of the Speaker Dennis Hastert, as the President mentioned, the Annual Session of the OSCE in 2005 will be held in Washington, DC. I very much welcome your invitation to everyone here to propose thoughts on a theme. We will certainly do so to help make that a very significant event – I believe that it is the first time that such a session is taking place on American soil. I know that President Hastings and the Speaker Hastert are working very hard to make that a very successful event. We very much look forward to the Winter Meeting coming up here in Vienna.

I'd like to just share with you that in the years that I've been the U.S. Ambassador at OSCE, I have found that one of the most important pillars that enables our Mission to function effectively is the very close cooperation that we enjoy with the Helsinki Commission. I wish for all of us here that we will see in the years ahead the continued growth of parliaments, especially those that are now less significant than they might be – so that all of you around this table can draw also on the strength from your parliamentarians in carrying out your work here at OSCE.

We believe that the parliamentary dimension of the OSCE is extremely valuable, and we look forward to continuing our cooperation and developing our relationship even further.

Thank you very much.